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ABSTRACT

The author, editor of the National Society for the Study of Education yearbook on secondary education, reports some contentions and observations presented by the yearbook's chapter authors. Each author addressed one of nine central issues. The issues are in the areas of the individual, values, social realities, man's experiences, education's environment and setting, the content of the schools, the schools' organization, teaching strategies, and the administering, supervising, and improving of education.
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SPEAKER: William Van Til

TOPIC: Issues in Secondary Education--Report of NSSE Yearbook for 1976

PLACE: Room 6, Convention Hall

TIME: 2:30, Sunday, February 22

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Let us make no mistake about it. Today in the United States public secondary schools are being severely criticized. From the left comes criticism by the deschoolers who would substitute "opportunity webs" for schooling. The deschoolers include Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, Theodore Roszak, and Everett Reimer. From the left also comes condemnation of traditional education by the compassionate cirtics who call for schools based on the expressed interests of children and adolescents. Among the compassionate critics are John Holt, George Dennison, James Herndon, and Herbert Kohl. From the right, advocacy of "back to basics" is heard, a call characterized by nostalgia for past simpler ways of living as well as on emphasis upon long-established fundamental skills. The proponents are strange bedfellows: among others, fundamental religionists, academic critics, and citizens troubled by swift change. More difficult to locate on the spectrum are scholars who call for marked expansion of transitions to adulthood other than schooling. Prominent among the chairmen of committees and commissions advocating such reform of the high school in the 1970s are James S. Coleman, B. Frank Brown, and John Henry Martin.

In such a setting of vigorous examination of public secondary education, the National Society for the Study of Education decided to develop a yearbook on secondary education. The consensus of the advice to NSSE from a range of specialists in secondary education was that a yearbook should focus on the crucial issues in secondary education. A yearbook committee agreed upon nine issues as central. They invited authors to develop chapters on each issue. Their discussions were preceded by a historical account of the development of issues in secondary education by Robert H. Beck.[1]

The crucial issues in secondary education today examined in the NSSE 1976 volume are:

1. How can secondary education best foster the fullest development of the individual's potentialities and experiences as a fully functioning, self-actualizing person?

2. How can secondary education best help youth to develop and apply humane values so that the democratic dream might be achieved and experienced by Americans and other citizens of the world?

3. How can secondary education best equip youth with the vision, knowledge, and competencies needed to cope with the social realities that threaten survival and vitiate the quality of life for mankind in the nation and on this planet in the present and emergining future?

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4. How can secondary education best utilize the winnowed and relevant experiences of mankind through drawing upon studies and knowledge in the education of contemporary youth?

5. How can secondary education best draw upon present and prospective school facilities and building and the life and institutions of communities and thus maximally use the total environment and setting for learning experiences by youth?

6. How can secondary education best develop a content that simultaneously takes into account social realities, humane values, the needs of individual learners, and bodies of knowledge derived from disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies?

7. How can secondary education best create, test and use enriching and effective ways of organization for the better education of youth?

8. How can secondary education best mobilize and use instructional resources and processes for learning experiences for youth?

9. How can secondary education best draw upon all affected groups, whether teachers, administrators, students, official bodies, interest groups, or individual citizens, in administering, supervising, and improving the educational enterprise?

This article written by the editor of the yearbook Issues in Secondary Education (National Society for the Study of Education, 1976, University of Chicago Press) will report some contentions and observations on these contemporary issues by chapter authors.

The Individual

How can secondary education best foster the fullest development of the individual's potentialities and experiences as a fully functioning, self-actualizing person? In secondary education the development of the individual is of high importance. Secondary education must be humanized so that the whole person is educated, so that people are treated as individuals, and so that self-actualizing human beings are developed.

Arthur W. Combs points out that "The concepts provided by perceptual-humanistic theory offer exciting new ways of thinking about the nature of persons and how they behave. The concepts are applicable to a wide variety of modern problems, and they are especially useful for the problems of education."

Combs believes that "For the larger goals of perceptual-humanistic psychology, an open, problem-centered approach to the learner will be increasingly required. Many of our traditional approaches to high school education have been primarily formulated in closed systems of thinking no longer appropriate for the attainment of modern goals. If human growth is truly a process of becoming, marked by motivation and need, respecting human potential, and conceiving learning as personal discovery, as perceptual-humanistic thinking would have us believe, then high school education must increasingly opt for open systems of thinking as basic guidelines for improvement and innovation."

Combs concludes that "We are fortunate, indeed, that the social and behavioral sciences are providing us exciting and promising theories at the very moment our changing needs confront us with the necessity for finding more adequate ways to carry out our educational responsibilities. What is needed now is the fastest possible exploration of these new concepts by the widest possible number of persons and their translation into practice with the greatest possible dispatch."

Values

How can secondary education best help youth to develop and apply humane values so that the democratic dream might be achieved and experienced by Americans and other citizens of the world? Value education is a formidable task for American secondary education. A crisis in values is apparent in American life. Contemporary youth has grown up in years characterized by the Vietnam disaster, the Watergate horrors, inconsistent approaches to race relations, immorality in relationships between business and government, and abuses of power abroad and at home by the Central Intelligance Agency

and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Lawrence E. Metcalf writes that "We are told today that the teaching of humane values can best be done inhumanely! Two inhumane ways are operant conditioning and pharmacology. Metcalf offers the alternative of regarding man as an active responsible agent capable of moral growth. He believes that Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral growth can be used in the teaching rational value analysis.

Metcalf calls for the use of personal dilemmas in moral education but adds "A rational value analysis falls short of its aim whenever it neglects the social origins and effects of a personal conflict. Therapy and instruction join hands when a teacher encourages students rationally to recognize social conflicts to which they have been insensitive. Without rational analysis of the social origins of value conflicts, students often do not know why they are unable to cope with common personal pathologies. They can be part of a problem without knowing what the problem is."

Metcalf concludes, "If teachers and counselors will apply rational value analysis to the personal manifestations of a cultural crisis that is now worldwide, and make this application under experimental conditions, we may learn to deal with some of the unsolved problems of education as to values.

Secondary educators have long believed in teaching the humanities. They have long believed in teaching the policy sciences and studying social problems. But we have not always seen the relevance of such content to moral growth and mental health. That relevance is becoming more clear. We now have some substantial understanding of actual down-to-earth teaching procedures for the analysis of value-laden content. These procedures are teachable, and it is possible to asscertain the effects of their use."

Social Realities

How can secondary education best equip youth with the vision, knowledge, and competencies needed to cope with the social realities that threaten survival and vitiate the quality of life for mankind in the nation and on the planet in the present and emerging future? The social realities which surround us today threaten mankind's very survival. There is the ever present threat of global war. Widespread terrorism adds a menacing new dimension. Pollution and overpopulation are twin time bombs. Racism persists and religious antagonisms rekindle. Internationally and nationally inequalities in income distribution are extreme. Yet people of good will struggle, sometimes successfully against the persistent problems.

Willis W. Harman believes that "The paramount social reality is that the technologically advanced nations of the world are approaching one of the great transformations of human history". He recognizes four basic dilemmas of the industrialized world. "The first of these is the growth dilemma. On the one hand, industrialized nations--capitalist or socialist--need continued economic growth for a viable economy; on the other hand, it becomes more and more clear that they cannot live with consequences... A second dilemma is that relating to technological control". The third dilemma is that "The industrialized nations will find it costly in economic terms to move toward a more equitable distribution of the earth's resources... The expectations and demands of the lesser developed world may well come at such a pace that they could be met only by a drastic lowering of the material standard of living in the rich nations." The fourth dilemma "is that while possession of a societally supported work role seems essential to the individual's healthy development and sense of self-esteem, yet the economy (at least in the capitalist nations) seems increasingly unable to provide enough satisfactory work opportunities". Harman regards the four dilemmas of the industrial system as "the ineluctable consequences of its success".

So Harman argues "that the unresolvability of society's fundamental dilemmas within the industrial-era paradigm suggests that this paradigm, with its technological imperative and its high value on the materialistic goals of efficiency, productivity, growth, and consumption, must give way to another." He suggests the emergence of a "new transcendentalism", supported by an "ecological ethic", and a "self-realization ethic".

Harman adds that "The next few years will reveal whether or not this transformational hypothesis holds up."

What would be implied for education if the new paradigm prevailed? "The most obvious reorientation is toward more emphasis on self-discovery and consequent development of a wholesome self-image...Implicit in this new paradigm is the proposition that all institutions of the society are, in an important sense, educative institutions... Educational research in the new paradigm would put a great deal of emphasis on such topics as stages of psychological and social developments; resistance and repression as phenomena in the learning process; roles of expectations, suggestion, and images; kinds of consciousness; origins of human value commitments; inter-personal dynamics."

Drawing Upon Man's Experiences

How can secondary education best utilize the winnowed and relevant experiences of mankind through drawing upon studies and knowledge in the education of contemporary youth? In a time of an explosion of knowledge, the issue becomes imperative. The most meaningful and relevant of man's experiences must be selected. We must teach concepts and relationships that employ selected facts and information rather than unselectively aspire to "cover the ground".

Arthur W. Foshay perceives "three types of knowledge offered in formal education: (a) knowledge about findings (what has been discovered, or 'is known'), (b) knowledge of the processes and sources needed to establish findings, and (c) knowledge of techniques". In discussing each he says, "The findings or 'facts', that have been established are most of what most people consider learning and they occupy most of what is offered in school... The knowledge of processes and sources is what makes theorizing , or thought, possible. But the tradition of secondary education gives such knowledge a relatively minor place in the curriculum... A technique is a set procedure of doing things which, once mastered requires no further thought or information". Foshay believes that these three types of knowledge are not usually distinguished from one another and that difficulties arise from the failure to do so.

After applying the three types of knowledge to the subject matters of mathematics, English and social studies and technical subjects, Foshay concludes, "Since knowledge of sources and processes incorporates the other two types of knowledge...this type of knowledge should be sought in all the offerings at the secondary school level, including the emerging community as educator approach, in which the community and its institutions are used as educational resources. The key to the present argument is that high school students, like all other people, demand that their activity have meaning... Much of the disaffiliation of students that plagues high school teachers arises from this failure to approach high school teaching as a quest for meaning."

Environment and Setting

How can secondary education best draw upon present and prospective school facilities and buildings and the life and institutions of communities and thus maximally use the total environment and setting for learning experiences by youth? Today's high school building has come a long distance from the 19th century schoolhouse. But as the comprehensive high school grew larger, it became more vulnerable to the accusation of giantism

and homogeneity. Therefore, a variety of alternative schools have been proposed to provide options and choices for students. Despite its tructural modifications, the school could not embrace the community. Therefore, action learning programs are being developed so that the student might relate to the community yet have the guidance and support that the trained professional can provide.

In a chapter collaboration, Vernon H. Smith and Robert D. Barr describe three concepts on which the development of alternative public schools and of action-learning experiences are based: "(1) that students, parents, and teachers should have choices among learning environment and learning experiences; (2) that different people learn in different ways; and (3) that schools should not be isolated from the "real" world outside."

Then Smith describes specific alternative schools and their wide variety: Open schools; schools-without-walls; learning centers; magnet schools; educational parks; continuation schools; multicultural schools; free schools; schools-within-schools, satellite schools, mini-schools; cooperatively developed alternative schools; complexes of alternative schools.

Similarly, Barr specifies schools using the several types of action-learning programs: Learning in the great outdoors, in unfamiliar cultures, in service agencies, in the professional community, from the past, in construction and urban renewal projects, on the road, in the political arena, in the world of work.

Smith and Barr believe that "Alternative schools and action-learning programs differ significantly from previous reform efforts. They are not intended to replace conventional education or the standard secondary school. They are available by choice for those families, those teachers, and those administrators who want different learning environments and different learning experiences. Since they are available by choice, they are not compulsory for all youth, and they do not require consensus within the community."

Smith and Barr conclude, "American secondary schools have entered a period of transition--from the large monolithic comprehensive school to a total educational structure that will include the comprehensive school along with a pluralistic realm of different and usually smaller optional alternative schools, each designed to be responsive to the learning and living needs of youth; from the isolated adolescent community to the community-centered education designed to bridge the gaps between academic learning and action-learning; from an institution with basic responsibility for cognitive education to an institution with basic responsibility for the transition from adolescence to adult-hood." They predict "that secondary education in the remainder of this decade and this century will continue to move toward a pluralistic array of opportunities for learning."

Content

How can secondary education best develop a content that simultaneously takes into account social realities, humane values, the needs of individual learners, and bodies of knowledge derived from disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies? In the 20th century, education has been marked by the swing of pendulums and the recurrence of cycles as emphases on one or another curricular source have developed in successive eras. Yet with each swing of the cycle and each recurrence of a valid emphasis, secondary education increasingly learned to draw upon several curriculum sources rather than oversimplify by relying on a single curricular source.

After tracing varied curricular thrusts in 20th century American education, editor William Van Til comments that "In broad terms the child-centered view (with its secondary corollary, a youth-centered view) dominated the educational dialogues of the 1920's.

In the social crisis of the 1930's, the debate over the social order, sparked by the social reconstructionists, held the center of the educational stage. The period of the 1940's saw a revival of concern for the values by which Americans should live, typified by the United States Office of Education stress on zeal for democracy and the projections of a better postwar society. In the late 1950's theorists and project practitioners fostered the study of the separate disciplines. The social turmoil of the 1960's was reflected in the compensatory education movement on behalf of the socially underprivileged. In the late 1960's the compassionate critics emphasized the needs and interests of the learner. Alternative transitions to adulthood, involving action learning and expanded work opportunities, were proposed in the mid 1970's."

Van Til speculates that "Perhaps in the closing quarter of the twentieth century an educationally pluralistic view that recognizes the interaction of several sources of the curriculum will prevail. Perhaps we will recognize and learn to implement a secondary education concerned with the needs of youth as perceived by the humanistic psychologists, the analysis of values as recommended by the philosophers, the social realities of our times as reported by the students of sociology of education, and the uses of meaningful disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge as developed by the scholars." He suggests sixteen possible centers of experience as highly important in a balanced and significant program of secondary education today: war, peace, and international relations; overpopulation, pollution, and energy; economic options and problems; governmental processes; consumer problems; intercultural relations; world views; recreation and leisure; the arts and aesthetics; self-understanding and personal development; family, peer group and school; health; community living; vocations; communication; alternative futures.

Van Til concludes that "While each of the above clusters of content is desirable in a well-rounded secondary education, schools will probably continue to differ in the relative emphasis they will place on each center of experience." But he contends "The total omission of one or more of the components of the list would serve neither the individual student nor American society."

Organization

How can secondary education best create, test, and use enriching and effective ways of organization for the better education of youth? Today the formal conception of the secondary school classroom is being challenged by new ways of staff organization and student grouping. In addition, new ways of curriculum organization are being developed.

J. Lloyd Trump and Gordon F. Vars recognize that "Today's schools usually organize the curriculum into courses measured in Carnegie Units, which typically require nine months to complete. A more rational organization would look at the question of required and elective learning as a three-way distribution.."Every student should be required to achieve essential learnings in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (in all of the areas of human knowledge)..These common learnings should include widely diversified content... A second curriculum division provides for students who have a special interest in a particular topic or subject area but who are not viewing the area as a potential career... The third part of the curriculum is that which is essential at the career level."

As to common learnings, the authors point out that "The core curriculum is a time-tested vehicle for developing individual and social values and competencies. Other interdisciplinary programs such as unified studies or humanities also have some potential in this regard, provided that these objectives are definitely built into the curriculum."

Along with innovative curriculum organization, varied patterns of staff organization are needed. For instance, "In a model disseminated by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the people involved in interacting with learners include a differentiated instructional staff, a differentiated counseling staff, and a differentiated staff for supervision and management." The differentiated instructional staff includes teachers, instructional assistance, clerical assistance, and general aides. "The differentiated counseling staff includes teacher-advisors with roles markedly different from teacher roles in conventional homeroom or advisory groups." With better organizational patterns, student motivation would be enhanced.

Trump and Vars believe that "With such diverse purposes, clientele, staff, and patrons, the secondary school must offer a rich array of organisational alternatives, and it must be prepared to modify curricula, staffing patterns, student groupings, time, space, facilities, and even intangibles such as school climate whenever needs change. Yet secondary schools must have enough stability and order to provide the psychological security essential to us all." Trump and Vars conclude that providing "the right mixture of order, flexibility, and diversity is a major challenge that educators must constantly confront and resolve."

Teaching Strategies

How can secondary education best mobilize and use instructional resources and processes for learning experiences for youth? In a time of revolution in communication far more than "book-learning" is needed in contemporary secondary education. The teacher is the potential master of a magnificent mix of materials and media. In such a setting, questions of teaching strategy become central.

Ronald T. Hyman classifies and names three types of teaching strategies: "exemplifying, enabling, and presenting... At this time, the best known strategy in its various forms is the presenting strategy. Most teachers consciously use the presenting strategy more than enabling and exemplifying. the lecture and recitation belong to this type of strategy, in which the teacher sets forth the information to be received and learned by the student...

In the enabling strategy the students engage in some activity, most often under the supervision of the teacher. Generally and preferably the activity concerns a problem to be solved... The third strategy, exemplifying, is the least used by teachers. Teachers do not often consciously and deliberately exemplify what they aim toward so that the student will learn through the teacher's exemplification." In each of the strategies a positive or a negative tone is set by the teacher. Similarly, "Each of the three strategies can be used in attempting to achieve each of the three types of goals... social, personal, or intellectual." So there are various possible combinations of strategies, tones, and goals that may be used in teaching.

Hyman calls for a wholesome pluralism in teaching. He believes that "the schools need to offer their students a wider range of opportunities to learn... The presenting of information to students should no longer dominate in our schools. As society changes, so must the school also change if it is to continue to be a beneficial institution to students. Teachers, supervisors, and professors will need to study teaching. Despite Dewey's call over seventy years ago for 'students of teaching,' few educators have engaged in such studies."

Administering, Supervising, Improving

How can secondary education draw upon all affected groups, whether teachers, administrators, students, official bodies, interest groups, or individual citizens, in administering, supervising, and improving the educational enterprise? Increasingly many groups are becoming involved in the work of the secondary school. Not only are teachers more vocal--community people are playing new roles and individual citizens and groups are increasingly speaking up and being counted in education. The leadership abilities of the new participants in secondary education must be developed if the schools are to truly serve the American people.

Ronald C. Doll believes that the central question of administration, supervision, and improvement of schools in our times involves several specific issues:

"1. Who shall be made responsible for the varied tasks involved in fostering learning?

2. How can people's potential for performance in fostering learning be utilized to the limit?

3. How can the specific tasks involved in fostering learning be distributed and discharged best?

4. How can skills and human relations and interpersonal communication be brought to bear in fostering learning?

5. How can the work of the varied participants be balanced and coordinated?

6. How can responsibility for outcomes be increased and improved without creating a rigid system of accountability?

7. How can the effects of cooperative effort to foster learning be evaluated?

Doll believes that educators now have some useful answers to such questions. They are as general as prizing the individual and as specific as developing evaluation services.

Doll concludes that to attain a better secondary education, "We shall need enlightened leaders who know how to fix responsibility among available personnel, how to develop people's potential, how to assign tasks, how to encourage desirable human relationships and communication, how to assist in balancing and coordinating people's efforts, how to make themselves and others reasonably responsible for outcomes, and how to evaluate the actual effects of fostering learning."

CONCLUSION

As the writer sees it, these are the crucial issues in secondary education today conceptualized by the yearbook committee and discussed by the varied yearbook authors in the 1976 yearbook, Issues in Secondary Education, which he edited for the NSSE. The time for action on such issues is now, as Virgil A. Clift and Harold G. Shane remind us in a closing chapter in which they speculate on the future, social decisions, and educational change in secondary schools.

Clift and Shane point out, "we should bear in mind that as of 1976 time is short and increasingly precious. Decisions in society and in education should be undergoing critical study between 1976 and 1980. Also, there should be substantial and prompt implementation of our planning, since many scholars in futures research see no more than twenty years and perhaps only ten before irreversible harm is done to the biosphere and to our long-range prospects for a viable life for humankind. Let us not use the enormity of our problems as a pretext for expressing fatalism and the deadly dangerous inactivity that it encourages."

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Issues in Secondary Education, the 1976 yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, was discussed at a meeting of the American Association of School Administrators in Atlantic City, February 22. William Van Til, Coffman Distinguished Professor of Education, Indiana State University, who edited the yearbook, described the views of the authors on nine crucial issues in secondary education. The National Society for the Study of Education is a scholarly organization of five thousand members, founded in 1901. Issues in Secondary Education is the first yearbook on this topic in the history of the organization. The yearbook urges a modern curriculum for high schools to deal with personal problems of youth, social problems of society and to foster value analysis. The yearbook supports the growth of alternative schools and action-learning. It presents new approaches to school organization.

Ronald T. Hyman, Graduate School, Rutgers University, talked on teaching strategies. George Young, Superintendent of Schools, St. Paul, Minnesota, appraised and evaluated the yearbook from the point of view of a school superintendent. Kenneth Rehage, University of Chicago, served as chairman for the NSSE, session at the superintendent's national convention.

Issues in Secondary Education, to be published in the early spring of 1976, is being presented at the winter meetings of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, as well as the American Association of School Administrators. Dr. Van Til, the editor of the book, has been a member of the department of secondary education at Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana since 1967. His most recent books are Education: A Beginning and Curriculum: Quest for Relevance and he is currently writing Secondary Education: School and Community for Houghton Mifflin publication. Dr. Van Til advocates a balance between schooling and community participation for American youth.